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THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW

APRIL, 1896

SOME ASPECTS OF RABBINIC THEOLOGY.

VI.

THE TORAH IN ITS ASPECT OF LAW.

R. SIMLAI, a well-known Agadic teacher and controversialist of the third century, preached as follows: "Six hundred and thirteen commandments were delivered unto Moses on Mount Sinai; three hundred and sixty-five of which are prohibitive laws, corresponding with the number of days of the solar year, whilst the remaining two hundred and forty-eight are affirmative injunctions, being as numerous as the limbs constituting the human body¹." This is the earliest source for the six hundred and thirteen laws, which are brought forward in many of our theological works, with the purpose of proving under what burden the scrupulous Jew must have laboured, who considered himself under the duty of performing all these enactments. The number is, by its very strangeness, bewildering; and the Pharisee, unable to rise to the heights above the Law, lay under the curse of its mere quantity. In this essay, the object of which is to treat of Torah in its aspect of Law, a few words as to the real value of those theological

¹ Makkoth, 23 b, and parallels in the יפה צניח (where פו"א פמ"ח ought to be corrected into ס"ח). Cp. Bacher's *Agada der Palästinensischen Amoräer*, I, 558, and notes. See also Bloch.

statistics are therefore necessary, before we pass to other questions connected with our subject.

The words with which I introduced the saying of R. Simlai, "He preached¹," must already have suggested some doubt as to the accuracy of his statement. Preachers have always enjoyed, as we know, a certain license, even in regard to quotations, and from them least of all have we to expect exactness in numbers. The lesson these numbers were intended to convey was, first, that each day brings its new temptation only to be resisted by a firm Do-Not; and on the other hand, that the whole man stands in the service of God, each limb or member of his body being entrusted with the execution of its respective functions². This was probably the sentiment which the preacher wished to impress upon his congregation, without troubling himself much about the accuracy of his numbers. How little, indeed, we are justified in urging these numbers too seriously is clear from the sequel of R. Simlai's sermon. It runs thus: "David came (after Moses) and reduced³ them (the six hundred and thirteen commandments) to eleven, as it is said: Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, &c.⁴ Then Isaiah came and reduced them to six, as it is said: He that walketh righteously, &c.⁵ Then Micah came and reduced them to three: He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, &c.⁶

¹ דרש ר' שמלאי in most of the parallels.

² Cp. Pesikta d' R. Kahana, 101 a, and Rashi to Makkoth, *ibid.* Cp. also Tanchuma חצאי, § 2. There are, however, grave doubts whether the subdivision in 365 and 248 (the words in the Talmud from אדם to ש"ה) is not a later addition. Cp. Bacher, *ibid.*

³ The word in the Talmud and in Tanchuma שפטים end is דחצמן, which may mean compressed or reduced. See Bacher, *ibid.* I take here the version of the Talmud, omitting the additional controversies. Cp. also Midrash Tillim, XVIII, end.

⁴ Pa. xv. 2-5, which verses contain eleven moral injunctions. Cp. Kimchi's Commentary to this chapter.

⁵ Isa. xxxiii. 15, which verse contains six moral injunctions.

⁶ Micah vi. 8, where three moral injunctions are contained.

Then Isaiah came again, and reduced them to two, as it is said: Thus saith the Lord, Keep my judgments and do justice¹. Then Amos came and reduced them to one, as it is said: Seek the Lord and live². Whilst Habakkuk (also) reduced them to one, as it is said: But the just shall live by his faith³. The drift of this whole passage shows that the sermon was less intended to urge the necessity of carrying out all the commandments with their multifarious details, than to emphasize the importance of the moral laws, which themselves, nevertheless, may be compressed into the principle of seeking God, or of faith in God.

Granted, however, as others think, that R. Simlai took it seriously with his number of six hundred and thirteen: granted, again, that his enumeration rested on some old authority which may be regarded as a guarantee for its exactness⁴, this would prove nothing for the Burden-theory. The only possible explanations of our Rabbi's saying are the lists of R. Simon Caro and of Maimonides⁵. But, as I have elsewhere pointed out, "even a superficial analysis will discover that in the times of the Rabbis many of these commandments were already obsolete, as for instance, those relating to the arrangements of the tabernacle, and to the conquest of Palestine; whilst others concerned only certain classes, as, for instance, the priests, the judges, the soldiers and their commanders, the Nazirites, the representatives of the community, or even one or two individuals in the whole population, as, for example, the king and the high priest. Others, again, provided for contingencies which could occur only to a few, as, for instance, the laws concerning divorce or levirate-marriages. The laws, again, relating to idolatry, incest, and the sacrifices of children to Moloch, could hardly

¹ Isa. lvi. 1.

² Amos v. 6. This was undoubtedly the original version of R. Simlai's words, notwithstanding the objection of R. Nachman b. Isaac.

³ Hab. ii. 4.

⁴ This seems to be the opinion of Maimonides.

⁵ The former in the הלכות גירלות, the latter in the ספר המצות and the Introduction to the משנה תורה.

be considered as a practical prohibition even by the pre-Christian Jew; just as little as we can speak of Englishmen being under the burden of the law when prohibited from burning their widows or marrying their grandmothers, though these acts would certainly be considered as crimes. A careful examination of the six hundred and thirteen laws will prove that barely a hundred laws are to be found which concerned the everyday life of the bulk of the people¹. Thus the law in its totality, which by the number of its precepts is so unpleasing to the theologian, is in its greater part nothing else than a collection of statutes relating to different sections of the community and to its multifarious institutions, ecclesiastical as well as civil, which constituted, as I have already said, the kingdom of God.

And here lay the strength of Judaism. The modern man is an eclectic being. He takes his devotion from the Bible, his laws from the Romans, his culture from the classics, and his politics from his party. He is certainly broader in his sympathies than the old Jew; but as a composite being, he must necessarily be lacking in harmony and unity. His sympathies are divided between the different sources of his inspiration,—sources which do not, as we know, always go well together. In order to avoid collision, he has at last to draw the line between the ecclesiastical and the civil, leaving the former, which in fact was forced upon him by a foreign religious conqueror, to a separate body of men whose business it is to look after the welfare of his invisible soul, whilst reserving the charge of the body and the world to himself.

The Rabbinic notion seems to have been that “if religion is anything, it is everything.” The Rabbi gloried in the thought of being, as the Agadic expression runs, “a member of a city (or community) which included the priest as well as the prophet, the king as well as the scribe and the

¹ “The Law and Recent Criticism,” *JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW*, vol. III, p. 763.

teacher," all appointed and established by God¹. To consider the administration of justice with all its details as something lying without the sphere of Torah would have been a terrible thought to the ancient Jew. And the Rabbis are most anxious to show that the appointment of judges was suggested by Moses, even before Jethro gave him the well-known advice². The Torah, they point out, is a combination of mercy and justice³. That the ways of the Torah "are ways of sweetness, and all her paths are peace," was a generally accepted axiom⁴, and went without saying: what had to be particularly urged was that even such laws and institutions as appear to be a consequence of uncompromising right and of rigid truth, rather than of sweetness and peace, were also part and parcel of the Torah, with her God-like universality of attributes. Hence the assertion of the Rabbis that God threatens Israel with taking back his treasure from them should they be slow in carrying out the principle of justice (*dinin*)⁵. "To the nations of the earth he gave some few laws; but his love to Israel was particularly manifested by the fullness and completeness of the Torah, which is wholly theirs⁶." And in it they find everything. "If thou wantest advice," the Rabbis say, "even in matters secular, or in questions regarding behaviour and good manners, take it from the Torah, even as David said, From thy precepts I get understanding⁷."

As a fact, the old Rabbis, as I have already indicated⁸, hardly recognized such a chasm between the material and the spiritual as to justify the domain of religion being confined to the latter. The old Rabbinic literature is even devoid of the words "spiritual" and "material." The

¹ Sifre, 134 a. Cp. Chulin, 56 b. The passage in the text follows more the reading in the MH. ר"מ אומ' כרמא דכולא ביה. כהני מחוכן ליינו מחוכו מלכיו. &c. מחוכו נביאי מחוכו חכמי מחוכו סופרי מחוכו ומשני מחוכו

² See Mechilta.

³ Debar. R., V, 7.

⁴ See, for instance, Succah, 32 a; Yebamoth, 87 b, and elsewhere.

⁵ Exod. R., XXX, 23.

⁶ Exod. R., *ibid.* 9, and parallels.

⁷ See Pesikta K., 105 a.

⁸ See JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, VII, 212.

corresponding terms, נשמי and רוחני, were coined by later translators from the Greek and Arabic philosophers, with whom the division between body and soul is so prominent. It is true that the Rabbis occasionally used such expressions as "things of the heaven" and "things of the world," or matters concerning "the eternal life" and matters concerning "the temporal life¹." But apart from the fact that they were little meant to indicate a theological division between two antagonistic principles, the "things of the heaven" covered a much wider area of human life than is commonly imagined. Thus we hear of a Rabbi who remonstrated with his son for not attending the lecture of his friend R. Chisda. The son apologized, and answered that he had once gone to the school of R. Chisda, but what he heard were "things of the world," the lecture having consisted in the exposition of a set of sanitary rules to be observed on certain occasions. Whereupon the father rejoined indignantly: "He (R. Chisda) is occupied with the life of God's creatures, and dost thou venture to call such matters 'things of the world' ²?" Elsewhere we find the Rabbis deciding that to teach a child a trade or a handicraft is to be considered as one of the "delights of heaven," for which arrangements may be made even on the Sabbath³.

As a rule, the Rabbis spoke of sin and righteousness, a good action or a bad action, מצוה or עבירה, for each of which body and soul are alike held responsible. But no act is in itself the worse or the better for being a function of the body or a manifestation of the soul. When Hillel the Great, who, as it would seem, was the author, or at least the inspirer, of the saying, "Let all thy deeds be for the sake of Heaven⁴," was about to take a bath, he said, "I am going to perform a religious act in beautifying my person, which was created in the image of God⁵." "The

¹ מלי רעמא — מלי רשמיא. See e. g. Berachoth, 7 b, v. Shabbath, 33 b.

² Shabbath, 82 a.

³ דרשני שמים. Shabbath, 150 a.

⁴ See Pesikta R., 115 b.

⁵ Lev. Rabbah, XXXIV, 3.

fourth degree of love," says St. Bernard somewhere, "is to love self only for God's sake."

R. Judah Halleivi, with the instinct of a poet, hit the right strain when he said, in his famous Dialogue *Kusari*, "Know that our Torah is constituted of the three psychological states: Fear, love, and joy" (that is to say, all the main functions of man are enlisted in the service of God). "By each of these thou mayest be brought into communion with thy God. Thy contriteness in the days of fasting does not bring thee nearer to God than thy joy on the Sabbath days, and on festivals, provided thy joy emanates from a devotional and perfect heart. And just as prayer requires devotion and thought, so does joy, namely, that thou wilt rejoice in his commandments for their own sake, (the only reasons for this rejoicing being) the love of him who commanded it, and the desire of recognizing God's goodness towards thee. Consider these feasts as if thou wert the guest of God invited to his table and his bounty, and thank him for it inwardly and outwardly. And if thy joy in God excites thee even to the degree of singing and dancing, it is a service to God, keeping thee attached to him. But the Torah did not leave these things to our arbitrary will, but put them all under control. For man lacks the power to make use of the functions of body and soul in their proper proportions¹."

The law thus conceived as submitting all the faculties and passions of man to the control of the divine, whilst suppressing none, was a source of joy and blessing to the Rabbis. Whatever meaning the words of Paul may have, when he speaks of the curse of the Law, it is certain that those who lived and died for it considered it as a blessing. In the Babylonian Talmud, as I have elsewhere pointed out², one of the most frequent appellatives of God is the "merciful one" (*Rachmana*), and it is worth noticing that this term is mostly used in Halachic or casuistic discussions

¹ כחרי במסור ב' (ed. Sluzki, p. 45).

² JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, VI, 422.

about ritual cases, which proves how little in the mind of the Rabbis the Law was connected with hardness and chastisement. To them it was an effluence of God's mercy and goodness. In the daily prayer of the Jews the same sentiment is expressed in most glowing words: "With everlasting love thou hast loved the house of Israel, thy people; Torah, commandments, statutes, and judgments hast thou taught us. . . . Yea, we will rejoice in the words of thy Torah and thy commandments for ever. . . . And mayest thou never take away thy love from us. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who lovest thy people Israel."

The שמחה של מצוה, the joy experienced by the Rabbinic Jew in being commanded to fulfil the Law, and the enthusiasm which he felt at accomplishing that which he considered to be the will of God, is a point hardly touched upon by most theological writers, and if touched upon at all, is hardly ever understood. Renan maintains somewhere, that the best way to judge of a religion is, to have at one time been in it and afterwards out of it. None of the writers on the subject had the privilege or the misfortune to comply with these conditions. But still this "joy of the Law" is so essential an element in the understanding of the Law, that it "forms that originality of sentiment more or less delicate" which can never be conceived by those who have experienced it neither from life nor from literature.

How anxious a Jew was to carry out a law, and what joy he felt in fulfilling it, may be seen from the following story, which perhaps dates from the very time when the Law was denounced as slavery and as the strength of sin. According to Deut. xxiv. 19, a sheaf forgotten in the harvest field belonged to the poor; the proprietor being forbidden to go again and to fetch it. This prohibitive law was called מצות שכחה, "the commandment with regard to forgetfulness." It was impossible to fulfil it as long as one thought of it. In connexion with this we read in the Tosephta: "It happened to a Chassid that he forgot a sheaf in his field, and was thus enabled to fulfil the commandment with

This joy of the *Mizwah* constituted the essence of the action. "Let man fulfil the commandments of the Torah with joy," exclaims the Tanna of the school of Elijah, "and then they will be counted to him as righteousness²." The words, "Moses did as the Lord commanded him" (Num. xxvii. 22), are explained to mean that he fulfilled the Law with joy³. In a similar manner the words, "I have done according to all that thou hast commanded me" (Deut. xxvi. 14), are interpreted to signify, I have rejoiced, and caused others to rejoice⁴. Naturally, it is the religionist of high standard, or as the Rabbis express it, "the man who deserves it," who realizes this joy in the discharge of all religious functions, whilst to him "who deserves it not" it may become a trial of purification⁵. But the ideal is to obtain this quality of joy, or "to deserve it." The truly righteous rejoice almost unconsciously, joy being a gift from heaven to them, as it is said, "Thou (God) hast put gladness in my heart⁶."

This principle of joy in connexion with the *Mizwah* is maintained both in the Talmud and in the devotional literature of the Middle Ages. The general rule is: Tremble with joy when thou art about to fulfil a commandment⁷. God, his Salvation, and his Law, are the three things in

² תרנ"א, XXIX.

³ Sifre, 52 b.

⁴ Ibid. 129 a.

⁵ Yoma, 72 b, זכה משמחתו לא זכה צורפתו.

⁶ תרבת"ר, XVIII.

⁷ Derech Eretz Zuta.

which Israel rejoices¹. But R. Ibn Chalawa, to mention one of the later sages, declares that the joy accompanying the carrying out of a religious performance is even more acceptable to God than the *Mizwah* itself. The righteous, he proceeds to say, feel this ineffable delight in performing God's will in the same way as the spheres and planets (whose various revolutions are a perpetual song to God) rejoice in their going forth and are glad in their returning²; whilst R. Joseph Askari of Safed (16th century) makes joy one of the necessary conditions without which a law cannot be perfectly carried out. And I may perhaps remark that this joy of the *Mizwah* was a living reality even in modern times. I myself had once the good fortune to observe one of those old-type Jews, who, as the first morning of the Feast of Tabernacles drew near, used to wake and rise soon after the middle of the night. There he sat, with trembling joy, awaiting impatiently the break of dawn, when he would be able to fulfil the law of the palm-branches and the willows!

To give one or two further instances how many more things there are in the Synagogue and in the Law than are dreamt of by Christian divines, I will again allude to the Sabbath and to Prayer.

The institution of the Sabbath is one of those laws the strict observance of which was already the object of attack on the part of the compilers of the Synoptic Gospels. Nevertheless, the doctrine proclaimed in one of the Gospels that the Son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath, was also current among the Rabbis. They too teach that the Sabbath is delivered into the hand of man (to break it when necessary), and not man into the power of the Sabbath³. And the Rabbis even laid down the axiom that a scholar living in a town, where there could be among the Jewish population the least doubt as to the question whether the Sabbath might be broken for the benefit of a person dangerously

¹ Pesikta d' R. K., 147 a and 194 a.

² Kad Hakkemach.

³ Mechilta, 104 a.

sick, was to be despised as a man neglecting his duty ; every delay in such a case being fraught with grave consequences to the patient ; for, as Maimonides points out, the laws of the Torah are not meant as an infliction upon mankind, "but as mercy, lovingkindness, and peace¹."

The attacks upon the Sabbath have not abated. As I have elsewhere said, "the day is still described by almost every modern writer in the most gloomy colours, and long lists are given of the minute observances connected with it, easily to be transgressed, which would necessarily make the Sabbath, instead of a day of rest, a day of sorrow and anxiety, almost worse than the Scotch Sunday, as depicted by continental writers²." Even Hausrath—who is something more than a theologian, for he also writes charming novels—is unable to see in the Rabbinic Sabbath more than a day which is to be distinguished by a mere non-performance of the thirty-nine various sorts of work forbidden by the Rabbis on Sabbaths, such as sowing, ploughing, reaping, winnowing, kneading, spinning, weaving, skinning, tanning, writing, &c. &c.—a whole bundle of participles, in the expounding of which the Pharisee took an especial delight³. Contrast this view with the prayer of R. Zadock, a younger contemporary of the Apostles, which runs thus:—"Through the love with which thou, O Lord our God, lovest thy people Israel, and the mercy which thou hast shown to the children of thy covenant, thou hast given unto us in love this great and holy seventh day⁴." This Rabbi clearly regarded the Sabbath as a gift from heaven, an expression of the infinite love and mercy of God, which he manifested toward his beloved children. And, as I have already said, "the Sabbath is celebrated by the very people who did observe it, in hundreds of hymns,

¹ Jerushalmi Yoma, 45 b. Cp. Maimonides, הלכות שבת פ"ב ה"ג.

² "The Law and Recent Criticism," JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, vol. III, p. 763.

³ *History of the New Testament Times*, I, 101.

⁴ Tosephta Berachoth, III, 7 (ed. Zuckerman).

which would fill volumes, as a day of rest and joy, of pleasure and delight, a day in which man enjoys some presentiment of the pure bliss and happiness which are stored up for the righteous in the world to come, and to which such tender names were applied as the 'Queen Sabbath,' the 'Bride Sabbath,' and the 'holy dearly-beloved Sabbath¹.' Every founder of a religion declares the yoke which he is about to put on his followers to be easy, and the burden to be light; but, after all, the evidence of those who *did* bear the Sabbath yoke for thousands of years ought to pass for something. The assertion of some scholars that the Rabbis, the framers of these laws, as students leading a retired life, suffered in no way under them, and therefore were unable to realize their oppressive effect upon the great majority of the people, is hardly worth refuting. The Rabbis belonged to the majority, being mostly recruited, as I have already pointed out in another place, from the artisan, trading, and labouring classes². This very R. Zadock, whom I have just mentioned, says:—"Make not the Torah a crown wherewith to aggrandize thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig;" whilst Hillel considers it as a mortal sin to derive any material profit from the words of the Torah³.

The prayers of the synagogue are another case in point. That Jews could pray, that they had, besides the Temple, a synagogue-service, independent of sacrifices and priests, does not, as every student must have felt, fit in well with the view generally entertained of the deadly and deadening effects of the Law. The inconvenient Psalms of the later periods were easily neutralized by divesting them of all individualistic tendency, whilst the synagogue was placed under the superintendence of the Rabbis, whose mechanical tendencies were well known. In their hands prayers turn into rubrics, and it is with an especial delight that theo-

¹ "The Law and Recent Criticism," JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, vol. III, p. 763.

² JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, vol. VII, p. 212.

³ Aboth, IV, 7.

logians dwell on the Rabbinical laws relating to prayer, as, for instance, how many times a day a man ought to pray, the fixed hours for prayer, in what parts of the prayer an interruption is allowed, which parts of the prayer require more devotion than others, and similar petty little questions of religious casuistry in which the Rabbi, as a professional, if I may call him so, greatly delighted¹. But these writers seem to overlook the fact that the very framers of these petty laws were the main composers of the liturgy. And who can say what the Rabbi's feelings were when he wrote, for instance, "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned"? The word Father alone suggests a world of such ideas as love, veneration, devotion, and child-like dependence upon God. It is easy enough to copy rubrics. They float on the surface of the so-called "Sea of the Talmud," and it requires only a certain indelicacy of mind, or what Renan would have called "the vulgarity of criticism," to skim them off, and pass them on to the world as samples of Jewish synagogue-life. If Life and Times-writers would only dip a little deeper into this sea, they would notice how easily the Rabbis could disregard all these rubrics. Thus we read, with reference to Jeremiah xiv. 8: God is the *Mikwah* of Israel, which word the Rabbis take to mean "the source of purity" (Israel's purification being established by attachment to God). "God says to Israel, I bade thee read thy prayers unto me in thy synagogues; but if thou canst not, pray in thy house; and if thou art unable to do this, pray when thou art in thy field; and if this be inconvenient to thee, pray on thy bed; and if thou canst not do even this, think of me in thy heart²." Prayer is, indeed, as the Rabbis call it, "the service of the heart³," but "matters given over to the heart," as the Rabbis phrase it, can, as the Rabbis express themselves in another place, only be comprehended by God. Prayer, and the recitation of the Shema, are among the things which keep the heart of

¹ See Weber, 40-42, and Schürer, II, 408 seq.

² Pesikta d' R. K., 158 a.

³ Taanith, 2 a. Cp. Sifre, 80 a.

Israel in exile awake¹, and God requires of Israel that, at least in the time of prayer, they should give him all their hearts²; that is to say, that the whole of man should be absorbed in his prayer. "Prayer without devotion is like a body without a soul," is a common Jewish proverb. God himself teaches Israel how to pray before him³; for nothing is more beautiful than prayer; it is more beautiful even than good works, and of more value than sacrifices⁴. It is the expression of Israel's love to God; God longs for it⁵. Prayer is Israel's chiefest joy⁶. Hence the benediction in which Israel thank God that they are permitted to pray to him⁷.

And here I must again be allowed an allusion to personal reminiscences. The following passages in the Song of the Unity are recited in some congregations on the Eve of the Day of Atonement:—

Now we, thy people and thy flock, delight to do thy will.
 But how can we serve thee when there is neither sacrifice
 nor oblation, seeing that we are not come unto the place
 of our rest,
 Neither is there any water to cleanse us of impurity, for we
 are in an unclean land?
 Verily I rejoice at thy word, and at thy bidding am
 I come;
 For it is written, Not for thy sacrifices nor for thy burnt-
 offerings will I reprove thee;
 I have not commanded thy fathers concerning them.
 What have I required and sought of thee but to fear me,
 To serve me with gladness and a cheerful heart?
 Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
 And a contrite heart than pure oblation:

¹ See Shir Hashirim Rabba, V.

² Tanchuma, כי תבא, § 1, end.

³ See Rosh Hashanah, 17 b.

⁴ See Tanchuma, ירבא, § 1, and Sifre, 71 b.

⁵ See Midrash Tillim, CXVI.

⁶ See Yalkut to Ps. c. Cp. Midrash Tillim to this chapter.

⁷ See Jerushalmi Berachoth, 3 d (the first lines on the top). Cp. Baer's remarks to the מוירים ורבנן.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

Sacrifice and oblation thou didst not desire, nor didst thou demand sin-offering and burnt-offering.

I will build an altar of the wreckage of my heart, and will crush the spirit within me.

My proud spirit and haughty looks I will humble ; yea, I will rend my heart for my Lord's sake.

These broken fragments of my spirit, these are thy sacrifices. Oh, may they rise, an acceptable gift, upon thine altar!

But only one who has seen the deep despair reflected on the faces of the worshippers, as they repeat the first stanzas bewailing the loss of sacrifices as a means of an atonement, and the sudden transition to the highest degree of joy and cheerfulness at the thought expressed in the last stanzas, that it is neither burnt-offering nor meat-offering which God requires, but that the heart is the real altar and the service of the heart the real sacrifice—only one who has witnessed such a prayer-meeting will be able to conceive how little the capacity of the Rabbi to pray, and to rejoice in prayer, was affected by the rubrics, and how superficial is the common conception of Christian theologians on this subject.

I shall now pass to another question in reference to the Law. I will quote Schürer, who is, of course, in this respect, the expounder of older views, being followed again by the whole tribe of minor theologians. His words are : "But what were the motives which gave rise to this enthusiasm for the Law? And what were the means by which the Law gained this terrible power over men's souls" (*Gemüther*)? The answer of the professor amounts to this :—It was the belief in the divine retribution (including both punishment and reward), and this in the strictest juristic sense of the term. If Israel refrain from sin, it is because they are afraid of the chastisement of God, with which he has a right to visit them by the terms of his contract with them. If they act in accordance with his will, it is because they expect him to reward them either in this

or in the next world, it being God's duty as a master to pay well those who carry out his wishes¹.

I have treated of the belief of the doctrine of retribution in Rabbinic literature in another place. Here let it be simply stated that the Rabbis, though never tired of urging this belief, and striving to make of it a living conviction, displayed a constant tendency to disregard it as a motive for action. The saying of Antigonos of Socho, "Be not like servants that serve their master with the view to receive reward," is well known². All the commentators on the sayings of the Fathers explain this sentence as meaning that love pure and simple is the only worthy motive of the worshipper. But we must not look upon this saying of Antigonos as on one of those theological paradoxes in which divines of all creeds occasionally indulge. It is a sentiment running through the Rabbinic literature of almost every age. Thus the words in Deuteronomy xi. 13, "To love the Lord your God," are explained in the Sifre to mean: "Say not, I will study the Torah with the purpose of being called sage or Rabbi, or to acquire fortune, or to be rewarded for it in the world to come; but do it for the sake of thy love to God, though the glory will come in the end³." The words in Psalm cxii. 1, "Blessed is the man who delighteth greatly in his commandments," are interpreted in the Talmud to mean, that he is blessed who delighteth in God's commandments, but not in the reward promised for his commandments⁴. This proves, by the way, that the Rabbis could depart from the letter of the Scripture for the sake of the spirit, the preceding verses in this very Psalm being nothing else than a description of the reward awaiting the pious man, who fulfils God's commandments. In the Midrash, those who, in view of Proverbs iii. 16, look out for the good things which are on the left side of wisdom, namely, riches and honours, are

¹ See *Geschichte*, II, pp. 388, 389.

² Aboth, I.

³ Page 84 a.

⁴ Abodah Zorah, 19 a.

branded as wicked and base¹. And when David said, "I hate them that are of a double mind, but thy law do I love," he indicated by it, according to the Rabbis, his contempt for mixed motives in the service of God, as the Law should not be fulfilled either under compulsion or through fear, but only from the motive of love². In the devotional literature of the Middle Ages, there is hardly a single work in which man is not warned against serving God with any intention of receiving reward, though, of course, the religionist is strongly urged to believe that God does reward goodness and does punish wickedness.

The real motive of this enthusiasm for the Law must be sought in other sources than the hope of reward. Those who keep the commandments of God are his lovers. And when the lover is asked, Why art thou carried away to be burned, stoned, or crucified, he answers, as we read in the Mechilta, Because I have studied the Torah, or Because I have circumcised my son, or Because I have kept the Sabbath; but he considers the suffering as wounds inflicted upon him for the sake of his beloved one, and his love is returned by the love of God³. The Law is thus a means of strengthening the mutual relations of love between God and his people⁴. The fulfilment of the Law was, in the eyes of the Rabbis, a witnessing on the part of the Jews to God's relationship to the world. "Why does this man," they say, "refrain from work on the Sabbath? why does he close his business on the seventh day? He does so in order to bear witness to the fact of God's creation of the world, and to his providence over it⁵." The Law, according to the Rabbis, was a source of holiness. Each new commandment with which God blesses Israel, adds holiness to his people; but it is holiness which makes Israel to be God's own⁶. They

¹ See Bemidbar Rabba, XXII.

² Midrash Tillim, CXIX, § 46.

³ 68 b.

⁴ See Mechilta, 98 a.

⁵ Ibid., 104 a.

⁶ Ibid., 98 a. Cp. also the passage commencing חביבן המצות in the ספר המצות in the ספר המצות about the end.

deduce this doctrine from Exodus xxii. 30, which verse they explain to mean that it is the fact of Israel being holy men *אנשי קדש* which gives them the privilege of belonging to God. Hence the formula in many benedictions: "Blessed is the Lord who sanctified us (or made us holy) through his laws, and found delight in us." These reasons, namely, the motive of love, the privilege of bearing witness to God's relationship to the world, the attainment of holiness in which the Law educated Israel, as well as the other spiritual motives which I have already pointed out, such as the joy felt by the Rabbis in the performance of the Law and the harmony which the Rabbis perceived in the life lived according to the Torah, were the true sources of Israel's enthusiasm for the Law. At least they were powerful enough with the more refined and nobler minds in Israel to enable them to dispense utterly with the motives of reward and punishment; though, as in every other religion, these lower motives may have served as concurrent incentives to a majority of believers.

S. SCHECHTER.